



LANDINGS

News & Views from Maine's Lobstering Community

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2024 MAINE LOBSTER SEASON A "REASONABLE SUCCESS"

By Melissa Waterman

It's common to hear that there's just no such thing as normal in the Gulf of Maine any longer due to climate change. As the Gulf has warmed, those things that lobstermen once considered stable, such as when lobsters move offshore or the time of molt, can't be predicted reliably. This past year showed that unpredictability was the name of the game yet again.

The rate of warming for the Gulf of Maine during summer months (1.04 °F per decade) is roughly four times faster than the summer warming rate for the world's oceans (0.27 °F per decade). According to the Gulf of Maine Research Institute in Portland, sea surface temperatures in the Gulf were particularly warm during June in 2024, when temperatures were about 4 °F above the long-term average. That's a lot of warm water. Temperatures moderated after June, rising about 1.5 °F above the average during the rest of the summer.

Willis Spear, who fishes from Portland, started his season as usual in May. "The price was good but then it dropped down to \$4 a pound. It's hard to make it work at that price. It discouraged a lot of the Casco Bay guys from going. I'd say there was 30% fewer fishing," he said.

He caught more hard-shell lobsters than shedders this year, which he attributed to fishing hard bottom off Cape Elizabeth. "The lobsters were small hard-shell lobsters. I only had one or two [traps] full of shedders all season," he said.

He noticed that the water temperature began to change mid-summer. "I have a friend who has temperature sensors on his traps. He said the water was around



Price, not volume, made 2024 profitable for many Maine lobstermen. MLMC photo.

51°F in July, then went to 47 °F in August," he said. Spear, like many lobstermen, is acutely aware of the effect climate change has had on the Gulf. "You can't predict the weather anymore. In the summer we don't have the southwest wind

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TAKING STEPS TO INCREASE AFFORDABLE HOUSING ON VINALHAVEN

By Working Waterfront staff

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With the help of a \$840,000 Maine Housing grant, the Vinalhaven Housing Initiative began construction this fall on its first project to create affordable homes for islanders, year-round workers, and elders priced out of the housing market.

"It's a crisis," said Dylan Jackson, the group's project director. "Soaring housing costs are driving year-round residents from their homes, forcing young people to move off-island, and altering the character of Maine's largest unbridged working island."

The nonprofit VHI was formed in 2023 with a mission to create year-round, affordable and sustainable housing for island residents. VHI's initial project begins this month when the island's ferry crew quarters, which was slated for demolition, will be moved to East Boston Road to join an existing VHI property with two rental apartments.

The crew quarters will be reconfigured to a three-bedroom family home, says VHI president Elin Elisofon. In addition, the property will feature a pre-built modular home, which will be brought to the island by barge and placed on its foundation.

"Depending on the size of the family and number of people in each apartment," Elison said, "there could be as many as ten or more individuals, including children and pets, living year-round in energy efficient housing, close to school, the library, and the village center."

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COASTAL OUTLOOK *Thoughts from MLCA President Patrice McCarron*

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Melissa Waterman
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Happy New Year! It's time to break out the 2025 calendar and start a brand new year. Can you believe that a quarter of a century has passed since the new century began? A lot has changed since we flipped the calendar to 2000. That year Maine lobstermen landed 57 million pounds of lobster at an average price of \$3.28 per pound. Maine fishermen had lots of other fisheries in 2000 they could operate in as well. They landed 2.6 million pounds of cod in 2000, compared to last year's 95,000 pounds. Herring stocks were strong, allowing fishermen to land 100 million pounds that year. And Maine still had a shrimp fishery; fishermen brought 4.6 million pounds ashore in 2000.

So much has changed since then, largely driven by warming waters in the Gulf of Maine. Lobster landings skyrocketed during the 2000s, peaking in 2016 when over 132 million pounds were landed in the state. Since that date, landings have remained strong, between 110 million and 93 million pounds annually. As we report this month, the 2024 season seemed on par with the previous year's, with landings a little lower but offset by a robust price at the dock. Some lobstermen expressed uncertainty about coming years while acknowledging that no one really knows what the next year will bring.

DMR Commissioner Patrick Keliher writes in his column this month about the sheer number of major events the industry has faced over the last 10 years, from historic landings, market crashes, offshore wind, and a near shutdown of the fishery averted by an act of Congress. He writes that many lobstermen are struggling with a sense of anxiety after enduring so many ups and downs in recent years. Many are concerned about the upcoming gauge change. DMR is preparing to implement the gauge increase to comply with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (ASMFC) lobster plan. Keliher points out that DMR does "not have any discretion to choose not to make this change." Looking ahead, his top priority remains pushing back on any new draconian whale measures coming from NMFS. He remains committed to maintaining an open dialogue with the industry.

Maine's application for an offshore wind research array lease in federal waters southeast of Portland was approved in August 2024. DMR has been conducting a variety of research studies in the lease area to gain better understanding of its bathymetry, oceanographic characteristics, and the marine species that use the area. Budgetary constraints

within the department, however, will limit additional studies, including one on lobster.

In July this year, the ASMFC's new regulation requiring an increase in the minimum legal size of lobsters caught in LMCA 1 goes into effect. Lobstermen strongly oppose the increase — from 3 1/4 inches to 3 5/16 inches — which they argue is not needed. We asked Kathleen Reardon, DMR lead lobster scientist, some questions about the science behind the gauge change and its anticipated results.

The affordable housing crisis in the state has been foremost in the news for several years now. The scarcity is acute along the coast and on the islands, where demand for seasonal rentals and second homes is keeping many out of the market. The lack of affordable housing affects everyone, from lobstermen who can't find sternmen and marine busi-

nesses who can't hire workers to young families and the elderly. The Vinalhaven Housing Initiative decided to do something about the problem in their community. With a \$840,000 Maine Housing grant, the non-profit group began construction this fall on its first project to create affordable homes for year-round workers.

Uncertainty about the future is just one of many types of stress affecting lobstermen. As we learn in this month's "To Your Health" article, unrelieved stress can negatively impact physical health by weakening the immune system, making the body more prone to

colds or more complicated illnesses. Stress increases blood pressure, which can lead to stroke, heart attack, and other serious illnesses. Finding ways to handle stress can help maintain one's health now and long into the future.

Finally, we all know how hard it is to fish for a living. Whether it's a dayboat out for Maine scallops in the dead of winter or a halibut longliner crashing through the Gulf of Alaska, *National Fisherman* magazine found a way to show its readers the reality of fishing. A selection of the more than 3,000 historic photos that *National Fisherman* donated to the Penobscot Marine Museum in Searsport has been published in a new book by Islandport Press. *Working the Sea*, authored by Michael Crowley, showcases the vessels involved in commercial fishing in the 19th and 20th centuries. It's a brief glimpse of a past that still informs much of New England's fishing traditions.

We hope you enjoy this issue and look forward to your comments. Happy New Year!

Patrice



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GUEST COLUMN: *Looking back and ahead*

By Patrick Keliher

I was asked to write an article that looks back on the past year, as well as my thoughts about what's to come. After more than 14 years as the DMR Commissioner, it's hard to reflect on only the past year, as so much has happened over the last decade. Just a few of the major events of the past ten years that come to mind include:

- market/price crashes
- unprecedented landings
- covid-19 pandemic
- 100% harvester reporting
- right whale regulations
- an attempt by NOAA to close the fishery to protect right whales
- Congressional action creating a six-year pause that avoided the closure of the lobster fishery
- a big legal win for the lobster industry lead by MLA
- electronic trackers (and being sued by members of the industry)
- record high prices along with record high expenses
- offshore wind development threats
- changing stock status
- declining landings
- gauge change

This list isn't exhaustive, but it includes some of the highs and lows over the years. I recognize, based on conversations with industry members, that after all these ups and downs many lobstermen are struggling with a sense of uncertainty about the future. For example, I know that many people are concerned about the unknown impacts of the pending gauge change. On top of that we now have President Trump's statements about large tariffs on Canada which could have an even bigger impact. Meanwhile, lobstering expenses remain at an all-time high, right whales are not going away, and lobster resource issues are front and center.

After many years of discussion, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (ASMFC) Interstate Fisheries Management Plan for American lobster now requires Maine to implement an increase in the minimum gauge from 3 ¼ to 3 5/16 inches beginning July 1, 2025. DMR must implement this change through a new regulation, which we will be initiating in early 2025. To be clear, this is a compliance issue for Maine, and we do not have any discretion to choose not to make this change.

I know that the uncertainty this change creates is causing additional stress in the industry due to the unknown effects it will have, but I am also required to consider the long-term sustainability of the lobster fishery.

While landings are not the reason for making this change (it is based on indices of juvenile abundance), it is hard not to look at our 2024 landings without thinking about how the resource may be changing.

In 2023, Maine's landings dropped to 94 million pounds. That's a 38-million-pound decrease from the 132-million-pound historic high landings in 2016. As I look at the preliminary 2024 landings, it's clear we will be down even more significantly. Part of the goal for improving the spawning stock biomass through the gauge change is to buffer the resource against changing environmental conditions in order to provide more stability and long-term sustainability for future generations of fishermen.

In addition, the FMP calls for a second gauge increase in 2027. Starting in 2025 I want to have additional conversations with industry regarding whether the Fishery Management Plan should be amended before that takes place. We will know more about how the first gauge change impacts individuals and markets, which can inform how ASMFC proceeds. Is there an alternative to a gauge increase that the industry would prefer? With input from the Zone Councils we have a new Area 1 Lobster Conservation Management Team (LCMT) that I hope will take on these questions and challenges. Their input will be brought

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Patrick Keliher is the Commissioner of the Department of Marine Resources. DMR photo.

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DMR CONDUCTS BROAD RANGE OF STUDIES IN MAINE OFFSHORE WIND RESEARCH ARRAY LEASE AREA

By Melissa Waterman

The Department of Marine Resources (DMR) has multiple research efforts underway in Maine's offshore wind research array lease area. Budget difficulties, however, may limit or delay some of those activities in 2025.

The federal Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) requires studies at lease sites that evaluate the impact of proposed activities on physical, biological, and socioeconomic resources. The lease holder, in this case the state of Maine, must also assess the seafloor and sub-seafloor conditions that could be affected by the construction, installation, and operation of wind turbines, cables and supporting structures.

Maine decided to go beyond BOEM's requirements by conducting additional baseline surveys to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the lease area. DMR was chosen as the lead agency for the additional surveys; \$2 million from the department's budget was set aside annually for the studies. Research topics came from the recommendations of the Fisheries Working Group involved in the Maine Offshore Wind Roadmap, which was completed in 2022.

According to Meredith Mendelson, DMR deputy commissioner, a downturn in projected state revenues will require DMR to reevaluate department priorities for the 2025-2027 budget. Half of the \$2 million designated for the offshore wind research array surveys will be reallocated to other department activities. "There won't be funds for the next several years for certain baseline studies as intended," Mendelson said. Lobster surveys in the lease area are paused for the moment as well as boat-based visual wildlife surveys.

A broad array of survey work has been done to date, however. DMR, in collaboration with the Governor's Energy Office and the Maine Offshore Wind Research Consortium, mapped the bathymetry of 337 square nautical miles in the lease area and will continue the mapping work in May 2025. Grab samples at 25 locations in the western quadrant of the area have been completed, providing information on the sediment characteristics of the seafloor.

Zooplankton and larval lobster surveys conducted by Bigelow Laboratory took place between September 2023 and August 2024 in the northern section of the lease area. Additional surveys will be conducted using a DMR vessel in the spring. Active acoustic surveys by the Gulf of Maine Research Institute, which detect fish and determine stock distribution, began in June 2023 and will conclude in July 2025.

Staff from DMR's highly migratory species office have tagged 76 sharks to gain insight into travel patterns in the area. Twelve dedicated receivers will be installed in the area in 2025 in order to track the individual animals' movements. One passive acoustic monitor will be deployed in July 2025 specifically to monitor baleen whales passing through the lease area.

The University of Maine and Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute have set up three shore-based radar stations to collect surface wind data; additional stations will be added in 2025 to get greater spatial coverage. In addition, five underwater gliders have been deployed by the University of Maine in the lease area to gather oceanographic data. A bottom trawl survey will begin this month. Survey tows will be made in specific locations four times during the year to understand the seasonal distribution of species in the area.

"This work is supported by DMR and the Fisheries Working Group because we want to know more about this area. We will keep going as we can," said Carl Wilson, director of DMR's bureau of marine science.



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Keliher continued from page 3

directly to ASMFC's Lobster Management Board for consideration.

In addition to changes in the resource, the challenges with right whales remain. Many of you have asked how the new Trump Administration might change the situation. It's unknown, but it is on the top of my "To Do List."

While I am writing this, I am currently in D.C. with DMR's lobbyist, talking with members of Congress as we develop our next steps. Unless there is a change in the Endangered Species Act or the Marine Mammal Protection Act, NOAA still will be required to follow the law, and they will keep pushing hard on draconian measures, and we will keep pushing back on their unfounded assumptions. While I can't broadcast our strategies, I can tell you it remains a full court press that includes direct coordination with the Maine Congressional delegation and the MLA. This issue remains my highest priority.

It is not yet clear what the new Administration might bring to the table regarding changes to NOAA. Frankly, I hope there are many. NOAA no longer sees DMR as a partner they should collaborate with. We used to be but our input, like yours, is often ignored. It is time for change that ensures that the federal agency that oversees fisheries uses co-management to better manage the country's commercial fisheries.

Two things about the Administration are more certain. One is a likely movement away from offshore wind. It's my best guess that offshore wind development in the Gulf of Maine will not be a Trump Administration priority. The other major change is the potential for new tariffs to significantly impact global economics and lobster moving between the U.S. and Canada. As referenced above, President Trump has proposed a 25% tariff on all products from Canada. This could result in retaliatory tariffs, which will mean major disruptions to lobster trade. We have begun talks with our delegation so they understand what is at stake. There will be more to come related to changes proposed by the new Administration.

Over the next two years my commitment is to maintain an open dialogue with industry through expanded engagement with the lobster zone councils, the Lobster Advisory Council, and now the Area 1 LCMT. I hope you will also make these face-to-face conversations a priority. We might disagree at times, but let's not let disagreements cause us to lose sight of our mutual goal to support the long-term health and prosperity of this tremendously important industry.

YOUR QUESTIONS, ANSWERED: *Why is the ASMFC changing the lobster gauge?*

In October 2024 the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) voted to delay an increase to the minimum legal size of lobsters to 3 5/16" in LCMA 1 until July 1, 2025. This is the third time the Commission has delayed the increase, mandated by Addendum 27 to its lobster management plan. On July 1, 2027, the minimum size is scheduled to increase again, to 3 3/8".

According to ASMFC, Addendum 27 was adopted as a proactive measure to protect lobster spawning stock and increase resilience of the stock as the Gulf of Maine environment changes. We posed your questions about the gauge increase and its conservation value to DMR lobster scientist Kathleen Reardon.

What caused the gauge change?

Since May 2023, ASFMC's lobster management plan requires management measures to be put in place if there's a 35% or greater decline in lobsters just below legal size, based on three years of ventless trap and inshore trawl surveys from Maine, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire. In October 2023, the ASMFC Lobster Technical Committee revealed that surveys showed a 39% decline in small lobsters using data through 2022, triggering implementation of the gauge increase in LCMA 1. In 2024, the trigger index was updated and showed a 44% decline from the last stock assessment using data through 2023.

Why does Addendum 27 focus so much on gauge and vent size changes?

The ASMFC's Lobster Technical Committee looked at different ways to protect the lobster spawning stock. Those included changes to both the minimum and maximum gauge size, trap reductions, seasons, and quotas for the Gulf of Maine, Outer Cape Cod, and Georges Bank Lobster Management Areas. For Area 1, changing the minimum size was determined to have the greatest positive biological impact on the lobster population with the least negative economic impact to the fishery, if implemented incrementally. The positive impact comes because currently the fishery is harvesting lobsters before more than 50% have the opportunity to reproduce.

Lobstermen say they see lots of juveniles on the bottom and in places where they used to be scarce. How can the number of small lobsters be down so much?

The survey data agree that there are still many sublegal lobsters in the Gulf of Maine compared to 20-30 years ago, but the numbers of shorts have gone down in recent years. When you compare the survey numbers to the last three years of the assessment (2016-2018), they show a significant decline. One theory is that the survivability of small lobsters has decreased, leading to fewer sublegal lobsters. Rather than repeating waiting until lobster landings fall sharply before taking action as happened in Southern New England, ASFMC's lobster management plan proactively seeks to reduce the risk of a serious decline in the Gulf of Maine by building a greater buffer in the form of protecting more eggers.

The 2023 American Lobster Settlement Index indicates that more young lobsters are settling throughout the Gulf again. Why do we need to worry?

After 10 years of DMR's settlement survey detecting relatively low numbers of young-of-the-year lobsters settling to the bottom, the 2023 numbers were up. This coincided with warm temperatures, algal blooms, and high rainfall. We don't know what conditions will be in the years ahead. We could have more years like 2023 or it could be like the 2010s, which were not as favorable for lobster survival. By changing the minimum size while lobster abundance is still high, the ASMFC seeks to create a buffer during the good years in order to sustain the fishery in years when the conditions are less favorable.

Isn't DMR's data skewed because it's not surveying the areas where lobstermen are finding juvenile lobsters?

In response to concerns from lobstermen that small lobsters may be missed by surveys, DMR is expanding data collection. Previously, the commercial sea sampling program completed three trips per zone per month wherever fishermen were fishing. Starting in September 2024, DMR began targeting four trips split evenly between state and federal waters in each zone monthly from May through November. In 2025, DMR will pilot a new collaborative program with a small number of lobstermen who will be given tablets to collect and enter lobster data themselves from their traps and from experimental ventless traps hauled with commercial trawls in federal waters. We plan to track these data into the future, compare to existing datasets, and hope our data will better inform offshore lobster dynamics.

DMR notice

Gauge rulemaking hearings in January

Maine is required to comply with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (ASMFC) Interstate Fisheries Management Plan for American lobster. For this reason, the Department of Marine Resources (DMR) is now undertaking rule-making to change the minimum lobster gauge from 3-3/4 inches to 3-5/16 inches, effective July 1, 2025. The Department will be holding two public hearings in early January. DMR will compile all comments received at the meetings, along with Department responses, and present the package to the DMR Advisory Council in the spring for their review and consideration.

For clarity, this rule-making DOES NOT incorporate the second required gauge change of an additional 1/16th inch in July 2027. It also DOES NOT include the vent changes required in July 2028. After the initial gauge change takes effect, DMR will be convening the recently reconstituted Lobster Conservation Management Team (LCMT) for Lobster Management Area (LMA) 1 to advise on future management measures. The major manufacturer of gauges in Maine is aware of the pending change and has indicated that the necessary gauges will be available.

Date, time and location of public hearings:

- January 7, 2025 at 5:00 pm at Jeff's Catering, Brewer, ME
- January 9, 2025 at 5:00 pm in DMR's Conference Room 118, Marquardt Building, Augusta, and remotely via Microsoft Teams. Remote access information is posted to www.maine.gov/dmr/home under "meetings."

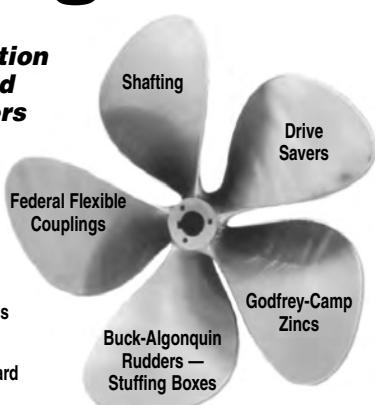
If cancelled due to snow: an alternate hearing will be held on January 10 at 3:00 p.m. in DMR's Conference Room 118, Marquardt Building, Augusta, and remotely via Microsoft Teams.

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Director of Advancement
Kevin Kelley
kevin@mainelobstermen.org

Office Administrator
Mindy Coath
mindy@mainelobstermen.org

Membership Director
Sunshine Mechtenberg
sunshine@mainelobstermen.org

Maine Lobstermen's Association
2 Storer St., suite 203
Kennebunk, ME 04043
207-967-4555
www.mainelobstermen.org



STEAMING AHEAD

BY PATRICE MCCARRON, MLA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

With 2024 behind us, it's important to reflect on the resilience and the challenges that have come to define the Maine lobster fishery, which is so deeply embedded in the state's economy and identity. Like so many recent years, 2024 was a year filled with ups and downs, yet it was, in many ways, historic. The common thread through all of it was MLA's steady presence — listening to lobstermen, attending meetings, networking, sharing information, writing letters — as we pursued our mission with passion and determination to sustain a healthy lobster fishery.

The year got off to a difficult start when the Maine coast experienced unprecedented damage from two devastating storms in January. Later that month, we received the shocking news of the first right whale death in Maine lobster gear.

The federal government moved forward in 2024 with several controversial programs. It began tracking federal lobster boats and requiring them to submit electronic Vessel Trip Reports (e-VTR). It invested over \$18 million to develop ropeless fishing technology, and in October, issued four commercial offshore wind leases in the Gulf of Maine. The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) added to lobstermen's frustrations by keeping alive its plan to increase the minimum lobster measure, which was ultimately delayed to 2025.

The MLA faced its own challenges when its Chief Operating Officer resigned, leading to a year of restructuring.

2024 also offered glimmers of hope. Our coastal communities came together to rebuild Maine's working waterfronts and fishing infrastructure. The Governor, Legislature and DMR rallied and provided \$60 million to support the rebuilding and may have set a new government speed record by funding 68 projects by August. Senator Collins secured an additional \$15 million to support ongoing investments in working waterfronts.

In May, the D.C. federal court finally took the wind out of the sails of a coalition of national environmental groups by dismissing its 2018 lawsuit that nearly dismantled Maine's lobster industry by forcing more closures, weak rope and trap cuts scheduled for 2024. Congress paused implementation of these measures in December, 2022, and coupled with MLA's historic court victory against the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), the court's previous rulings in the case were nullified.

After several years of nothing but bad news on the fate of right whales, 2024 brought some good news. We now have three years of data showing an increase in the number of right whales. As of October 2024, the population totaled 372 whales and NMFS upgraded the previous population low from 332 whales in 2020 to 358 whales. The turnaround is a result of a variety of factors, but most significantly, births now exceed deaths. Over the last five years, 77 right whale calves have been born, and right whale deaths have declined from peaks in 2017 and 2019. And NMFS now counts calves when they are born rather than waiting for them to be resighted. Also on the whale front, the MLA's defamation lawsuit against the Monterey Bay Aquarium is still working its way through the court, and MLA hopes for a positive outcome in 2025.

One of the things that really hurt the lobster industry in the last round of whale rules was a lack of data on right whales

in the areas where Maine lobstermen fish. DMR largely erased that problem in 2024. In less than a year, DMR used \$17 million from Congress to build an entire right whale monitoring program from the ground up. It is an incredible accomplishment.

The state now monitors the presence and absence of right whales through acoustic listening devices, vessel-based, and aerial surveys. The acoustic devices are deployed in a grid at 26 sites across all Maine's waters out to Area 3. In 2024, the vessel-based survey covered nearly 1,000 nm within 25 miles from shore and the aerial survey covered nearly 4,400 nm from the beach out to Area 3. DMR now has a modeler and plankton scientist amongst its many new science staff and is working to develop its own right whale risk model.

While herring and groundfishermen grapple with the massive quota cuts announced in 2024, and the shrimp fishery remains closed, lobster remains a healthy, sustainable resource that continues to support a profitable fishery.

In 2023, lobster landings were down but the value increased by \$75 million making it a solid season for most lobstermen. 2024 is shaping up to be similar. Once all of the lobsters are counted and the dollars added up, DMR expects to see a reduction in landings but an increase in the value of the fishery because of this year's strong boat price.

The economic health of the lobster fishery is among the many challenges the lobster industry will face as we move into 2025. The interplay between predicted reductions in landings and the need to maintain strong markets to support a

healthy boat price has fueled the controversy over the gauge change within the industry.

Despite efforts of the MLA and many others to oppose the gauge increase, and after being delayed three times, the minimum size will increase to 3 5/16" in July. The DMR will conduct rulemaking and hold two public hearings in January to comply with ASMFC. It will be frustrating for everyone to attend public hearings knowing that you cannot change the outcome. Nevertheless, the MLA will continue to tell regulators that lobstermen are seeing lots of small lobsters in their traps and believe the resource is healthy and are worried about lost revenue and market impacts of the measure increase. The MLA will not waver in its opposition and will redouble its effort to prevent the second measure increase scheduled for 2027.

The MLA will also persist in calling for ASMFC to remove the 24/7 provision from the electronic tracker requirement. The MLA supports improving data on the lobster fishery, but a data collection program should not track lobstermen on their personal time. Five Maine lobstermen challenged Maine's implementation of the tracker requirement in Bangor District Court, but the judge dismissed the lawsuit in November, ruling in favor of the state. The lobstermen are appealing this decision. The MLA believes this can be solved through the management process and is optimistic that we will be successful in removing the 24/7 requirement in 2025.

Offshore wind is one of those issues that every fisherman seems to agree on — it does not belong in Gulf of Maine!



Standing ready for the next year. MLA photo.



MAINE LOBSTERMEN'S ASSOCIATION UPDATE

The lobster industry earned a big win in March when the federal government announced that commercial offshore wind development would not be allowed in Lobster Management Area 1. The removal of LMA 1 from the offshore wind leasing process was a result of significant advocacy from MLA and many other fishing industry groups, and strong support from Governor Mills and the Maine Congressional delegation.

Despite this win, there are now two leases that could impact Maine fishermen. The first is the state of Maine's research array which is moving forward in partnership with Diamond Offshore Wind. The state leased 15,000 acres located 28 miles offshore in Zones D and E where it plans to build 12 floating turbines using the University of Maine's platform technology. This lease proposal slipped through the process before LMA 1 was taken off the table.

The second is a commercial development that could be developed by Invenegy NE Offshore Wind which paid \$4.9 million for a 98,000 acre lease located 46 miles off midcoast Maine. Most political observers agree that the Trump Administration is unlikely to get behind offshore wind which could stall the Gulf of Maine projects. Rest assured that the MLA will continue its efforts to keep offshore wind development out of the Gulf of Maine.

The MLA's strength lies in its advocacy for Maine lobstermen and I am confident that the MLA is well-prepared to tackle the next phases of right whale, offshore wind and lobster management issues. Our efforts will be bolstered by MLA's historic court win in 2022 and the Supreme Court decision in 2024 to do away with "Chevron deference." No longer will the courts simply defer to the federal agency when interpretation of a law is unclear. The MLA will continue to work closely with our Congressional delegation to ensure that federal agencies do not over-reaching its authority.

In 2025, MLA will work to expand our programs beyond the policy arena building on programs started in 2024. The MLA was partner in a study published by the University of Maine identifying socio-economic indicators of resilience in the lobster industry, and is now collaborating with Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries to conduct an economic survey of the lobster industry to provide the data we need to determine the impact of future management measures. We will again work with Fishing Partnership Support Services to bring free safety trainings to harbors in Maine. The MLA also plans to spend more time in coastal communities, meeting members on the docks to hear their thoughts on what is most important for the lobster fishery.

It's impossible to predict what the new year will bring. Whatever happens, know that the MLA will continue to listen carefully to our members to use our collective strength to preserve our lobster fishery so it will sustain our coastal communities and heritage over the next 70 years.

I am excited to be back as MLA's Executive Director and I am looking to the new year with a strong sense of optimism.

Happy New Year!

Patrice

MLA DIRECTORS MEETING SUMMARY

The MLA Directors met on December 5. President Kristan Porter welcomed board members and guests. Erin Summers and Kevin Staples gave a presentation on the Department of Marine Resources (DMR) gear library and gear testing program. The funding for these programs was provided by Congress as part of the six-year pause on whale rules in order to collect data on right whales in the Gulf of Maine and to test alternative gear.

DMR established the Gear Library to collaborate with fishermen in testing experimental gear and evaluate what works, what does not work, and why. It is important that industry input is not limited to fishermen in Canada and Massachusetts who are not able to fish with traditional gear due to high co-occurrence with right whales. Fishermen are compensated for gear testing as well as training. The rate varies depending on boat size and whether gear is tested on a fishing or non-fishing day.

DMR has established four gear hubs — in Brunswick, Boothbay Harbor, Stonington, and Addison — to ensure lobstermen and gillnetters can access the gear. The gear library includes lift bags and stowed rope options from a variety of manufacturers. The gear library currently has 209 acoustic release units, and 52 spring release and 46 timed-release units. DMR can outfit more than 60 vessels with gear. There are five fishermen actively testing gear, but many more are in the process to test gear. To date, DMR has documented mixed results; some gears have worked well while others have not. DMR communicates results to gear developers and does not continue to deploy gear that does not work.

MLA directors reiterated opposition to ropeless fishing. The board acknowledged the importance of testing gear to document why it is not an appropriate solution for the Maine lobster fishery. DMR noted that NMFS has not yet set a new risk reduction goal for the next round of whale rules, so it is impossible to know if Maine will face more closures and how much pressure there will be to adopt ropeless fishing.

DMR scientist Sarah Leiter presented an overview of DMR's right whale aerial and vessel surveillance programs. She worked as a sternman for eight years so understands the importance of integrating lobstermen's perspectives in the right whale monitoring program. She wants to be sure lobstermen understand the program and seeks feedback to ensure that industry priorities are addressed.

DMR's right whale survey program includes both aerial and vessel-based surveys. The goal is to improve understanding of where and when right whales are using the Gulf of Maine and to fill data gaps. To date in 2024, DMR conducted 13 vessel surveys covering nearly 1,000 nm within 25 to 30 miles from shore. These surveys detected a variety of large whales but no right whales. Fifteen aerial surveys were conducted from July to November covering 4,350 nm from the beach into Area 3 waters. Nine right whales were observed in two detections. One flight sighted a right whale on Jeffreys while another sighted a group of eight near the Bay of Fundy. DMR's data is available on www.whalemap.org as it becomes available. DMR also has an expansive passive acoustic array set up on a grid at 26 sites. These are not real-time recordings; the devices must be retrieved and data downloaded.

DMR asked for input on priorities for these surveys, where to focus resources, and how best to share results with the industry. MLA Directors were strongly in favor of conducting more surveys around the LMA 1 closure. In terms of specific priorities, the board believes it will be important to survey areas identified as high risk by the Large Whale Take Reduction Team (TRT) since those areas are more likely to have closures or other strict measures. The Board also suggested incorporating opportunistic data into the models. Suggestions included having lobstermen sign affidavits when they don't see whales, though DMR noted that lobstermen are working and not looking for whales, or to have DMR sea samplers certify days that they don't observe right whales. DMR appreciated the suggestions, noting that the department has a staff member focused on citizen science. The Board recommended that DMR distribute survey results in monthly or quarterly updates and include the reports in Landings.

DMR explained that there is no guarantee that Maine's right whale data will make it into NMFS' model. NMFS plans to include data through 2023, the year before DMR began collecting data, and update whale data every two years. Fortunately, DMR is developing its own model and has hired a new plankton scientist who will work on the model. DMR will also publish the results of its work so it will be considered best available science.

Kristan thanked DMR staff for sharing their work with MLA. He then opened the business portion of the meeting. The primary business item was to review and approve the 2025 MLA budget as presented by the Finance Committee and discuss the nomination process to elect board members at the 2025 Annual Meeting. On behalf of the MLA Finance Committee, Treasurer Jarod Bray presented the 2025 budget which was approved by the Board. The Board formed a nominating committee to move forward MLA's election process for 2025. The MLA Board will have a retreat in January to set its plan for next year.

Membership director Sunshine Mechtenburg reported that membership is going well. She has received a strong response to a recent membership mailer. Patrice updated the board on MLA's collaboration with a Maine Center for Coastal

Continued on page 8



THE MAINE LOBSTERMEN'S ASSOCIATION 71st Annual Meeting

Friday, February 28 at 9 a.m.
at the Samoset Resort in Rockport.

The meeting will address issues important to the lobster industry such as lobster management, future right whale protection measures, and offshore wind development.

We want to hear from you!



MAINE LOBSTERMEN'S ASSOCIATION UPDATE

MLA Update continued from page 7

Studies project. It is a "redo" of the 2010 Lobster Industry Economic study done in partnership with GMRI. The phone survey will be completed from March through May to collect quarterly data from lobstermen. Participation is voluntary but strongly encouraged. The business has changed significantly since 2010, and it is important to update the data to understand the economic impact of offshore wind, new whale rules, and other management measures on the lobster industry.

MLA ANNUAL MEETING AND SOCIAL AT THE FORUM

The MLA's 71st Annual Meeting will be held on Friday, February 28, at 9:00 a.m. at the Samoset during the Maine Fishermen's Forum. The meeting will address issues important to the lobster industry such as lobster management, right whales, and offshore wind development.

On Friday after the close of the Trade Show and seminars, the MLA will host a social hour at the Samoset Golf Club. MLA will provide one free drink ticket to each attendee. Members and those who are curious about the MLA are invited to come and hang out with us!

RIGHT WHALE UPDATE

NMFS convened the Take Reduction Team on December 20 to provide an update on the estimated population size, review right whale entanglements, and start discussing a risk reduction target for meetings next year.

As of December 23, three right whale calves have been identified. The right whale calving season runs mid-November through mid-April. Researchers closely monitor the southeastern Atlantic coast for right whale mother/calf pairs. Right whale calving rates have been improving since the historic low of zero in 2018. Seven calves were identified in 2019, 10 in 2020, 20 in 2021, 15 in 2022, 12 in 2023, and 20 in 2024. More information on the 2025 right whale calving season can be found at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/endangered-species-conservation/north-atlantic-right-whale-calving-season-2025>.

Right whales appear to be on the move, as two right whales were spotted feeding in Cape Cod Bay in mid-November. There have been many voluntary slow

zones offshore of Maine, Cape Cod, Nantucket, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Virginia, and southeast of New York/New Jersey in effect through December 11. Near-real-time whale detections and opportunistic right whale sightings can be seen at <https://whalemap.org/WhaleMap/>.

OFFSHORE WIND NEWS

Cutbacks in Maine's offshore wind research – According to Maine DMR, funding for research related to Maine's offshore wind research array will be cut in half due to a projected budget shortfall in state revenue. Half of the \$2 million allocated for lobster surveys and wildlife surveys in the lease area will be redirected to other priorities.

RODA loses appeal on offshore wind lawsuit – On December 5, the First Circuit Appellate Court upheld the lower court's ruling, which held that fishermen are largely unable to bring claims related to environmental or aesthetic impacts to assert standing. The appeals court also reaffirmed the agency's ability to selectively include information in its decision-making. In its statement, RODA wrote that it is "extremely disappointed" in the appeals court rule which "ignores the deep, direct connection that our members, who work on the water every day, have with the ocean environment, falsely construing them as merely profit-seeking business owners. It is both perplexing and troubling that the court's decision suggests that a hobbyist or casual nature observer has more standing to understand or challenge potential environmental harm than professional fishermen whose livelihoods, communities, and very identity depend on the health of the sea."

RODA continued, "Although the First Circuit ruling showed a persistent lack of understanding regarding fishermen, the ocean environment, and a fundamentally flawed offshore wind leasing process, the most important goal remains to protect the environment and domestic food production. With dozens more offshore wind projects slated in our oceans, and lessons learned every day about the serious consequences of poor planning, it is now more critical than ever that concerned citizens work together to support our fishing communities. RODA remains committed to that task and will continue to advocate for the rights of commercial fishermen and the protection of the marine ecosystem they depend on."

MLA Seeks Nominations for Board of Directors

MLA Members -- Don't miss your opportunity to influence the future of your organization and your industry!

Did you know?

- MLA Directors are elected for a 3-year term
- MLA Directors meet monthly (except August)
- Board members expected to attend at least 4 meetings/yr

Overview of MLA Board

- Maximum # of Board members: 21
- Current Board: 21 members
- **Number of Directors with Terms expiring: 7**
- Average age of MLA Board: 48
- Youngest MLA Board member: 29
- Oldest MLA Board member: 76

MLA Board representation

- Zone A 4 (2 expiring)
- Zone B 3 (1 expiring)
- Zone C 4 (1 expiring)
- Zone D 3
- Zone E 2
- Zone F 2 (2 expiring)
- Zone G 3 (2 expiring)
- Islands represented: 5

2025 Board Priorities

- Dedicated lobstermen who care about the future of the industry
- Lobstermen who can talk about the industry's needs and priorities
- Balanced industry representation across the state

MLA Director Nomination Form (detach and return)

Nomination Requirements

- To make a nomination, you must be an MLA member in good standing.
- All nominees must hold a Maine lobster license & be an MLA member in good standing.
- Deadline for nominations: **January 31, 2025.**
- Feel free to nominate yourself, or someone else.

Nominee Information (must be MLA member)

Name: _____

Fishing Port: _____

Zone: _____ Town of residence: _____

Please let us know how this nominee could contribute to the MLA Board:

Person submitting nomination (must be MLA member)

Name: _____

Lobster Lic. #: _____



**Thank you
for helping to keep
the MLA strong!**

Mail your nomination to the MLA office: MLA, 2 Storer St, Ste 203, Kennebunk, ME 04043
Or feel free to call in your nomination to 967-4555 or email: patrice@mainelobstermen.org.



MAINE LOBSTERMEN'S ASSOCIATION UPDATE

The Trump Administration and Offshore Wind – the Associated Press quoted fisheries attorney Drew Minkiewicz that, “there is excitement in the [fishing] industry that offshore wind will basically be contained to its existing footprint and nothing beyond that,” referring to the fishing industry’s strong opposition to offshore wind development.

ASMFC SHRIMP

On December 12, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission’s (ASMFC) Northern Shrimp Section voted to keep the shrimp fishing moratorium in place for the 2025 fishing year. The 2024 Stock Assessment Update indicates the northern shrimp stock has been at low levels of biomass for over the past decade despite a fishing moratorium since 2014. The 2023 summer survey indices of abundance, biomass, and recruitment were the lowest in the 1984-2023 time-series.

Given the continued industry interest in data collection, ASMFC approved a pilot industry-funded winter sampling program for 2025 with a research set-aside quota of 26.5 metric tons (~ 58,400 pounds). The pilot sampling program is scheduled to run through March or until the quota is reached. The goal of the program is to collect wintertime biological data during the moratorium. Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts will outline the provisions of the pilot sampling program, determine a start date, and select the number of participants.

The Shrimp Section also approved for public comment Draft Amendment 4 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Northern Shrimp, which considers options to allow for longer moratoria (i.e., two-, three-, or five-year moratoria as opposed to setting a closed season annually). The Draft Amendment also considers adding recruitment and temperature triggers to the management toolbox that could signal when biological and/or environmental conditions are favorable to support stock rebuilding and a sustainable fishery. Finally, it considers allowing specifications setting timeframe for measures subject to change to be done via an addendum rather than an amendment. Public hearings on Draft Amendment 4 will be conducted in 2025. The Draft Amendment will be available on the Commission’s website under Public Input at <https://asmfc.org/about-us/public-input> in late December.

2024 INSHORE HERRING, MENHADEN FISHERIES CLOSED IN NOV.

Maine’s menhaden episodic event set aside fishery closed on October 31 while the non-commercial harvest closed on November 30. DMR reports that non-compliance with the daily reporting requirement for menhaden remains a problem, resulting in overages and lost harvesting opportunities statewide.

As of December 12, 49% of the 20,141 mt Atlantic herring quota had been landed. ASMFC closed the directed Area 1A herring fishery on November 12 because 92% of the quota had been landed. However, 79 mt of quota remain in Area 1B, 62 mt in Area 2, and 3,791 mt in Area 3. The fixed gear set-aside of 30 metric tons was available to fixed gear fishermen operating in Area 1A west of Cutler through December 31, 2024.

MAINE HALIBUT LICENSES AVAILABLE

The 2025 commercial and recreational halibut fishing license and halibut tags are available for purchase through LEEDs, DMR’s online licensing and landings

system, or in-person at the DMR Augusta office (32 Blossom Lane) on Monday, Tuesday, or Thursday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., or can be dropped in a secured drop box at DMR.

DMR anticipates new halibut rulemaking this winter to adjust halibut measures to match reduced quota. DMR will update the Halibut Compliance Guide for FY2025 when rulemaking is complete. The U.S. quota for Atlantic Halibut has been reduced to 35 mt for FY2025. While Maine was successful at increasing the percentage of the halibut allotted to Maine’s state fishery, Maine state waters sub-component will be reduced from 16 mt to 9.1 mt. If you are not a federal permit holder who fishes for halibut outside the state halibut season, you can wait to purchase your halibut license and tags until the outcome of the rule-making process is known, so that you may make an informed decision regarding whether or not you wish to purchase a license to participate in the 2025 fishing season. NO REFUNDS will be issued following the implementation of the new measures if you purchase your license and tags before rulemaking is complete.

MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE RECONVENES IN JANUARY

The First Regular Session of the 132nd Maine Legislature reconvenes in January 2025. The Maine Senate elected Mattie Daughtry (D-Brunswick) to serve as Senate President; Maine House elected Ryan Fecteau (D-Biddeford) to serve as Speaker of the House. The deadline for legislators to submit bill titles is January 10, 2025. The Marine Resources Committee will be a mix of new and returning members. The Committee will meet in Room 206 of the Cross Building. The clerk can be reached at 207-287-1337 or mar@legislature.maine.gov.

Marine Resources Committee members

Sen Denise Tepler of Sagadahoc (D), Chair Denise.Tepler@legislature.maine.gov 207-729-4018	Rep Cheryl Golek of Harpswell (D) Cheryl.Golek@Legislature.Maine.gov (207) 535-9857
Sen Marianne Moore of Washington (R) Marianne.Moore@legislature.maine.gov 207-952-2050	Rep Morgan Rielly of Westbrook (D) Morgan.Rielly@Legislature.Maine.gov
Sen Cameron Reny of Lincoln (D) Cameron.Reny@legislature.maine.gov 207-287-1515	Rep Abden Simmons of Waldoboro (R) Abden.Simmons@Legislature.Maine.gov (207) 446-4518
Rep Alison Hepler of Woolwich (D), Chair Alison.hepler@legislature.maine.gov (207) 319-4396	Rep Tiffany Strout of Harrington (R) Tiffany.Strout@Legislature.Maine.gov (207) 598-7043
Rep Holly Eaton of Deer Isle (D) Holly.Eaton@legislature.maine.gov (207) 610-9281	Rep Jim Thorne of Carmel (R) James.Thorne@Legislature.Maine.gov (207) 735-5827
Rep Wayne Farrin of Jefferson (D) Wayne.Farrin@legislature.maine.gov (207) 592-9057	Rep Peter Wood of Norway (R) Peter.Wood@Legislature.Maine.gov (207) 890-3324
Rep Irene Gifford of Lincoln (D) Irene.Gifford@Legislature.Maine.gov (207) 290-5087	Anne Davison - OPLA Analyst Anne.Davison@Legislature.Maine.gov 287-1670

MLA BUSINESS MEMBER OF THE MONTH: STORMLINE

One of the Maine Lobstermen’s Association’s newest business members is the international commercial rain gear company Stormline. Founded in New Zealand in the 1960s, today the company is still run by the founder’s family. “We’re still a small family business, third generation,” said Regan McMillan, Stormline sales director. “In that we are like a lot of Maine’s lobstermen.”

The company has focused on quality materials and constant innovation in its wet weather lines since its inception. A recent addition to its commercial fishing line is a full-length bib complete with flotation, a wearable PFD. The bib uses specially engineered closed-cell foam in the upper back to elevate the body above the water. It was praised by fishermen participating the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health PFD testing project several years ago. “We make sure that the materials and designs are as good as they can be and people appreciate that,” McMillan said.



Stormline came to Maine via word of mouth. Downeast Fishing Gear in Trenton started carrying the company’s products after a local fisherman came in and told the owners that they had to stock them. “They tried us out and they liked us,” McMillan said. Hamilton Marine stores also carry Stormline gear.

Choosing to become an MLA business member simply made sense, McMillan said. “We want to help support lobstermen. It’s been difficult for them the past few years, with the whale rules and offshore wind farms. Lobstering is a way of life but it’s also a family industry as well. There’s lots of similarities from where we come from.”

Stormline
sales@stormlinegear.com
508-258-4770



Thank you to our **2024** Donors

Thank you to those whose donations to #SaveMaineLobstermen Campaign total \$100,000+

John and Brendan Ready
Machias Savings Bank
Bar Harbor Bank & Trust
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Donald Sussman

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The Reny Charitable
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Andrew Stanley
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Wicked Wines

Gifts \$2,000 - \$2,999

Eric Beal
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Vinalhaven Lions Club
Lobster Bake

Gifts \$1,000 - \$1,999

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Jason Alley
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Dustin Emery
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Travis Otis
Cheryl & Justin Ryan, The
Dairy Corner, *in honor of
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John W. Tarbox*

Gifts \$100 - \$299

Fred Adair
James Austin
Daniel Backman, Sr.
Kenneth Banks
Louis & Anne Bigliani, *in honor
of Sandy Boardman*
Norman Brazer, Jr.
Jennifer Buermann, *in honor of
Peter Murphy*
Stephen & Joanne Burns
Albert Buswell
Dylan Carroll
John & Diane Clarner, *in
honor of Sandra Boardman*
John Clinton
Dan Colacino
Lydia Coleman
Emily Conway

John Daggett
Darwin & Jacqueline Davidson
Eric Davis
Kyle Doughty
Jennifer Elwyn, *in honor of
George N. Sewall*
Michael Floyd
James Foorman
Terence Gray
Jonathan Gugel, *in honor of
Dale Torrey*
Darwin & Jacqueline Davidson,
in honor of the Steele family
Judith Gary
Kendall Hall
Curtis & Sally Haskell, *in honor
of Ed & Mary Blackmore*
Stephen & Lisa Hewitt
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Sandy Boardman*
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Roger Kellett
The Kelley Family, *in honor of
Gene Kelley*
Shannon Kinney, *in honor of
Joan Sigrid Ames*
Steven & Doris Klemenz, *in
honor of James E. Klemenz*
Keith Lane

We can't predict the challenges to come. 2028 is right around the corner and we must be ready.

Burton Leach
 Barbara Malandrino
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 NH Commercial Fishermen's Association
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 Bonnie Remar, *in honor of Gary & Bonnie Castanino*
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 Patricia Snow, *in honor of Sandy Boardman*

Theodore Spurling, Jr.
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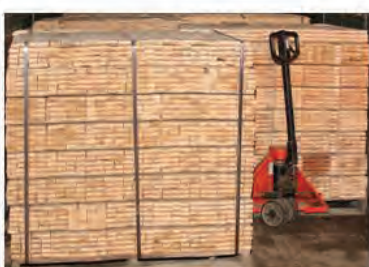
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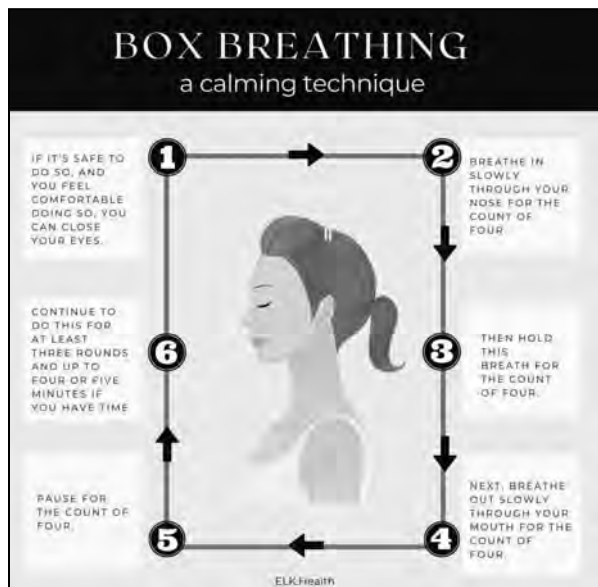
TO YOUR HEALTH: *Stress and building resiliency*

By Erika Anderson, MD, and Ann Backus, MS, Harvard Chan School of Public Health

In today's ever-changing and fast-paced world, there's hardly any time to slow down. From the moment we wake up in the morning, we all face a number of decisions. Fishermen have to make short-term decisions based on the weather, the previous days' landings and the condition of the boat. Longer term and broader considerations, such as the economy, local and federal regulations, and personal and family health, weigh on fishermen, as on all of us.

The decision-making process can be stressful. Stress, in turn, can negatively affect our physical health by weakening the immune system and making us more prone to colds or more complicated illnesses. Stress increases blood pressure, which then makes us vulnerable to stroke, heart attack, and other serious illnesses. Fishermen know well that a pump has to work harder to push fluid through a stiff-walled hose than through a flexible hose because the pressure in a stiff-walled hose is higher than in the flexible hose. It is the same story with stiffened arteries and the heart.

In addition to having an impact on blood pressure, stress can result in mood changes and can affect our sense of mental wellbeing.



We can address our mental wellbeing by investing in our physical health. Healthy habits such as engaging in regular exercise, getting sufficient sleep (at least seven hours per night) and eating a balanced diet of fruits, vegetables, protein, and whole grains can work wonders on our mental well-being. It also helps to be mindful of the effect of substances such as tobacco, marijuana, caffeine, alcohol, and other drugs. Although alcohol and other drugs may

“take the edge off” of stress for a short period of time, people often feel more

stressed after using these substances because they don't improve personal resilience or the ability to cope with stressors.

Sometimes, feelings of stress can come on in an instant. Taking a moment to do a breathing exercise can help de-escalate any sudden and severe feelings of stress or anxiety. One method is called “box breathing,” which involves inhaling for four counts, holding for four counts, exhaling for four counts, and holding for four counts. Box breathing can be repeated as many times as needed to create a sense of calm and reduce blood pressure. Box breathing can also be used as a technique to quiet the mind at night if stress is preventing a good night's sleep.

For ongoing, daily stress, it can be helpful to reframe how you think about those things that are troubling you. If we recognize that we have a negative, stress-inducing thought, we can reframe that negative thought into a positive one. Here are three examples:

“I can't do this,” can be reframed as, “I will figure this out and be stronger for it.”

“I have too many things to do at home,” can be reframed as, “I am lucky to have a family that needs me.”

“I have so much work to do,” can be reframed as, “I am grateful that I have meaningful, productive work to do.”

We can also reframe our view by changing our social life and/or surroundings. We can visit friends or relatives, take time out to see a movie with friends, take up and share a new hobby, or, if possible, travel to a warmer climate during the winter months.

Recent research from the Harvard Chan School of Public Health describes five factors that contribute to longer and healthier lives: social connection, prosociality, spirituality, optimism and work. Prosociality is defined as “behaviors intended to help or benefit others, such as sharing, volunteering or making a charitable donation.” The research shows that volunteering or helping others helps the volunteer at least as much, if not more, than it helps the receiver of the service. Being mindful of these five factors can help reduce stress and improve resilience.

Stressors in life are unavoidable, but if we take care of ourselves physically, take time for calming practices such as meditation and breathing exercises, reframe negative situations, dedicate time to stress-reducing hobbies and engage in social connections, we can become more resilient to the inevitable stresses of life and have longer, healthier lives.

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2024 lobster continued from page 1

in the afternoon. And the storms. I've been out and these small strong storms come right on top of you and no one predicted them," he said.

It was the price he received for his catch that affected Spear the most this year, however. "Other people have other options for work," he said. "But for me, this is it. I've got to go. When I was a kid you could go in the winter for scallops or shrimp. Not anymore. I just hope that next year the price doesn't go down to \$4. It's not enough to make a living."

York lobsterman Jeff White, on the other hand, said it was the price that made his season reasonably successful. "It was weird. A lot of guys in my area noticed they would get one good haul each month and then something would happen and the lobsters would disappear," he said. "Guys who fish outside or inside all saw the same thing"

The effects of climate change on the Gulf and the increased unpredictability of lobster fishing is something that White takes as a matter of course. "There is no normal. Every year is a new adventure. Forget what you learned last year, because every year is new." White typically moves his traps around frequently during the season. This year he found it didn't improve his catch.

He felt good when he got a decent haul, but he noticed it didn't seem to last long. Jillian Robillard of Southern Maine Crabs, White's buyer in Kittery, reported that lobstermen were all saying the same thing to her. Each time lobsters started showing up, they never stuck around.

"There are a thousand reasons why you're not catching them. It's the nature of the beast, it's nature itself," he said. "Next year will be different."

In Downeast Maine, one lobsterman, who asked to remain anonymous, found his catch to be "average, like the last five years." The price was good but keeping

his traps supplied with bait was hard, not because bait was limited but because something other than lobsters was gobbling it up. "We were just overrun with crabs. They take the bait overnight," he said. Lobster traps would come up full of crabs but there were no buyers for them.

On Beals Island, Dwight Carver saw his catch drop off in July. "The rest of the year I held on pound-for-pound compared to last year. The price difference more than made up for the drop in catch," he said.

He noticed that where he fished, on hard bottom approximately six miles off Great Wass Island, there were a huge number of small lobsters, "seed lobsters," as he called them. "I punched as many as I can ever remember punching. I figure every day I went, I punched 40 to 60 females a day."

While his catch was down this year, Carver isn't alarmed. "Year to year, things change. Back in the mid-1980s we didn't have much volume at all. Then there was a twenty-year boom and now it's going the other way. The days of 1,000-pound hauls are behind us."

He is concerned about the impact of the gradual decline in the lobster population combined with the planned increase in the minimum legal size, due to be implemented in July.

"It could be hard for the younger guys. They estimate [with the gauge change] the catch will be down by 10%. And then there could be another 10% drop because of Mother Nature. I think if you can get through the next three years, things will straighten out," he said.

"Guys are going to have to put their time in. If you go six days a week you can have a good week. You've got to get up and go to work. It's fishing."



While landings appear to be down in 2024, a good boat price made the year decent for many, but not all lobstermen. S. Mullin photo.



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In the NEWS

ADDITIONAL DFO PRESENCE IN BAY OF FUNDY THIS YEAR

The Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) plans to contract a vessel and crew to help DFO officers enforce lobster fishery regulations in the Bay of Fundy area in 2025. The contracted vessel would take DFO officers on patrols in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia to inspect fishing gear. DFO plans to be out on the water three days a week for at least 12 hours per patrol. The contract runs from January to March 2025 but can be extended through to spring 2026.

SCALLOP QUOTA DROPS BY 28%

The New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) has finalized Framework 39 for the 2025 scallop fishing season. The decision sets annual projected landings at 19.75 million pounds, a nearly 28% reduction compared to 2024. The reduction comes in response to scientific surveys conducted in



Photo courtesy of The New Bedford Light.

2024, which revealed significant declines in scallop biomass across key fishing grounds. The current outlook follows a steady decline in scallop landings since a peak of over 60 million pounds in 2019. In subsequent years, landings fell to 47.5 million pounds in 2020, 43 million in 2021, 31.5 million in 2022, and 24 million in 2023.

PFD USE AMONG WOMEN IN THE FISHING INDUSTRY

For decades, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has conducted studies of PFD use in commercial fisheries to increase use of PFDs among fishermen. However, these studies included few women, who may have unique concerns regarding the sizing, fit, and comfort of PFDs. NIOSH begins a new study this spring that will examine women's PFD use and opinions through a survey and PFD wear trial. The insights gained from this research could be used to enhance PFD designs to better suit the needs of women.

SMALL RESEARCH QUOTA SET FOR SHRIMP

New England shrimp will come back to seafood counters in small amounts this year due to a research fishing program. Since 2013 there's been a fishing moratorium for the shrimp because of concerns about low population levels, which scientists attribute to climate change and warming oceans. Researchers remain interested in collecting data about the shrimp, so a fishing industry-funded winter sampling program will take place this winter. The program will allow fishermen to catch up to 58,400 pounds of the shrimp.



Housing continued from page 1

Some village streets, traditionally lit up by year-round residents during winter months, are now dark as more houses have become second homes or short-term rentals. The high demand for seasonal and investment properties — not only on Vinalhaven, but throughout Maine — has led to increased property prices and taxes that are untenable for those trying to make a living on the island.

"This is an issue that affects us all," says Jackson. "VHI is working to ensure that there is a place here for our elders and the next generation of islanders, as well as the teachers, tradesmen, fishermen, medical support staff, and the many working people who make our island home a viable offshore community."

Twelve miles off the coast of Rockland, Vinalhaven is known for its robust lobster fleet, but lifelong resident and VHI Board member Darline Beckman says the housing shortage is affecting the industry.

"I've worked a lot on the waterfront, and there are more and more fishermen going out without a sternman because there's no housing for them. We all know it's dangerous going out alone, and eventually some guys give up fishing if they can't find the help. These are the people we're counting on to be the workforce, but they're hard hit." When Beckman graduated from Vinalhaven High School, she says she and her classmates could easily find an apartment. "That has all changed in one generation."

The Maine Housing grant and loan from the Genesis Fund do not cover the project's operational costs, so VHI is launching a campaign to raise \$200,000. The nonprofit, with a volunteer board, also encourages donations of housing and/or land to ensure affordable housing for coming generations.

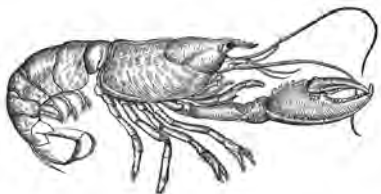
Vinalhaven joins several unbridged Maine islands — including Islesboro, Isle au Haut, Monhegan, and North Haven — with nonprofits supporting affordable, year-round living.

Island Institute's Alex Zipparo, who founded the Maine Island and Coastal Affordable Housing Coalition, says organizations like VHI are rare on the mainland, while islands have been leaders in this work out of necessity.

"These community-led initiatives are a model for rural, inland towns that are now experiencing the housing challenges that islands have always faced. Islands were the innovators and now stand in unity with other rural communities grappling with housing affordability," Zipparo said.

A 2022 report by Maine State Housing Authority found that "the average house price in Maine is unaffordable to the average income household in all Maine counties, except Aroostook."

Vinalhaven's heritage is at stake with the housing crisis. "For hundreds of years, Vinalhaven has been a working, multi-generational community," said Jackson. "Without available housing, this culture may be a thing of the past."



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Events Calendar

More details on all of these events can be found online at www.mainelobstermen.org

January 7

DMR public hearing on minimum gauge increase, 5:00 pm, Jeff's Catering, Brewer, ME

January 8

On-demand Fishing Gear Conflict Working Group webinar, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. via Zoom. Register at <https://nefmc-org.zoom.us/j/0rce-oqzwwG9OrjYCIYDsKlIZtezi59UUj#/registration>.

January 9

DMR public hearing on minimum gauge increase, 5:00 pm, DMR's Conference Room 118, Augusta, and remotely via Microsoft Teams. Remote access information is posted to <https://www.maine.gov/dmr/home> under "meetings"

January 10

Snow date if either DMR public hearing on gauge change is cancelled due to inclement weather, at 3 p.m. in DMR's Conference Room 118, Augusta, and via Microsoft Teams.

January 13-31

Rescheduled Bottom Trawl Survey of the Maine Research Array Wind Energy Area.

January 14

Aquaculture Public Hearing 1:00 p.m., Damariscotta Town Office

January 22

Aquaculture Public Scoping Session 7:00 p.m., Town of Cushing Community Center

January 27

Aquaculture Advisory Council meeting, 11 a.m.-2 p.m., DMR offices, Augusta.

January 28-30

NEFMC meeting, Portsmouth, NH.

January 29-30

U.S.-Canada Lobster Town Meeting, Atlantic Harborside Hotel, Bar Harbor

February 4-6

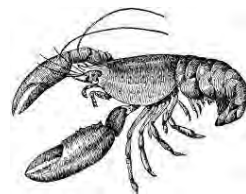
ASMFC winter meeting, Arlington, VA.

February 11-13

American Lobster Benchmark Stock Assessment Workshop #2, Greenland, NH

February 28

MLA Annual Meeting, 9 a.m., Samoset Resort, Rockport.



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Maine Fishermen's Forum Scholarship applications are now online at <https://mainefishermensforum.org/education/scholarships/>
Online applications are due by Feb. 21!

DMR Aquaculture Lease Applications: New Activity (10/25/24 - 12/20/24)

Cushing	Bailey Point Oyster Company	Broad Cove, St. George River	3.93 acres	Shellfish	Standard	20 yrs	Scoping session 1/22/25 7pm Cushing Comm Cntr
Damariscotta	Black Stone Point Oysters LLC	E of Blackstone Pt, Great Salt Bay	3.45 acres	Shellfish	Experimental	3 yrs	App rec'd 5/9/23; site report published 11/14/24
Deer Isle	Brewer, M. & Brewer, R.	East Penobscot Bay	4 acres	Shellfish	Standard	20 yrs	App rec'd 12/17/24; site review TBD
Edgecomb	Glidden Point Oyster Co.	SW of Dodge Pt, Damariscotta River	3.97 acres	Shellfish	Experimental	3 yrs	Pub.Hearing 1/14/25 1pm Damariscotta Town Off
Harpswell	Ferda Farms LLC	E of Bombazine Isl, New Meadows Rvr	5 acres	Shellfish	Standard	10 yrs	App rec'd 12/3/24; site review TBD
	Quahog Bay Conservancy	E of Snow Island, Quahog Bay	1.36 acres	Shellfish	Standard	20 yrs	App rec'd 5/18/23; site report published 12/5/24
	Wilson, David	SE of Doughty Pt, Long Reach	4 acres	Shellfish	Experimental	3 yrs	Lease Granted with Modifications 12/19/24
Long Island	Great Ledge Cove Seafood LLC	S L'il Chebeague Isl, NW Channel Rocks, Casco Bay	9.03 acres	Marine Algae	Standard	20 yrs	App rec'd 5/9/23, site report published 12/3/24
South Bristol	Nor'Easter Oyster Co.	Mid. Branch, NE of Peabow/W of Foster, Johns Rvr	3.32 acres	Shellfish	Experimental	3 yrs	App rec'd 7/18/23; site report published 12/18/24
	Norumbega Oyster	S of Merry Isl on eastern shore, Damariscotta Rvr	9.74 acres	Shellfish	Standard	20 yrs	Scoping Session 1pm S Bristol Town Hall
St. George	Miller, Hyvarinen, Philbrook	NW of Seavey Ledges, Penobscot Bay	3.99 acres	Marine Algae	Experimental	3 yrs	App rec'd 6/1/23; site report published 11/20/24
	Schroeder, Jeffrey	Turkey Cove, St. George River	.9 acres	Shellfish	Experimental	3 yrs	Lease Granted 11/12/24
	Tarbox, Brian	NW of Norton Isl, Wheeler Bay	3.99 acres	Marine Algae	Experimental	3 yrs	App rec'd 6/22/23; site report published 11/22/24
Steuben	Francis, Arnold	E of Birch Point, Dyer Bay	2.91 acres	Shellfish	Standard	20 yrs	Lease Granted 12/2/24
	Francis, Arnold	Smelt Brook, Dyer Bay	3.56 acres	Shellfish	Standard	20 yrs	Lease Granted 12/2/24
	Pinkham, Randy	E of Chair Pond Head, Pigeon Hill Bay	3.99 acres	Marine Algae	Experimental	3 yrs	Leases Granted with Modifications 12/2/24
	Sokoloski, Victor	E of Chair Pond Head, Pigeon Hill Bay	3.99 acres	Marine Algae	Experimental	3 yrs	Leases Granted with Modifications 12/2/24
Vinalhaven	Salt of the Earth Seafarm LLC	East Penobscot Bay	3.95 acres	Marine Algae	Experimental	3 yrs	App rec'd 10/22/24; comments due 11/23/24
Yarmouth	Hunt, Stewart	NE of Upper Basket Ledge, Casco Bay	9.1 acres	Shellfish/Algae	Standard	20 yrs	Scoping sess 12/20/24 3pm Yarmouth Town Hall

For an interactive source of pending lease applications, please see DMR's table of Pending Aquaculture Lease Applications, where you can find maps and documentation.
Go to: www.maine.gov/dmr/aquaculture/maine-aquaculture-leases-and-lpas/pending-lease-applications

Understand the Process — You Can Make a Difference!

Standard Leases are renewable and available for terms up to 20 years, up to 100 acres;
Experimental Leases are non-renewable and available for terms up to 3 years, up to 4 acres.



All Scoping Sessions, Public Comments Deadlines, and Public Hearings dates and locations are listed on the calendar at www.mainelobstermen.org/events and include links to corresponding DMR Notices.

WORKING THE SEA, HISTORIC IMAGES FROM NATIONAL FISHERMAN

Working the Sea, by Michael Crowley and the Penobscot Marine Museum and recently published by Islandport Press in Yarmouth, features more than one hundred images of fishing vessels from the 19th and 20th centuries drawn from the *National Fisherman* photo collection at the Penobscot Marine Museum. The images highlight the changes that swept through America's fisheries during those years.

National Fisherman magazine began life as *Atlantic Fisherman*, first published in 1921. In 1954 it renamed itself *National Fisherman* and in 1960 consolidated with *Maine Coast Fisherman*, based in Belfast. In 1967, *National Fisherman* took over *Pacific Fishing*, published in Seattle. The magazine proudly stated that it covered commercial fishing along the Atlantic, Pacific and Gulf coasts, the Great Lakes, and Alaska. For decades it was the magazine found in every vessel's galley, on kitchen tables, and in the shops of fishermen throughout the country.



Gillnets drying on a Portland wharf, 1926. Maine fishermen were said to be the first in New England to set gillnets. The gear quickly became popular throughout the region.

The 145-page book is divided into chapters: Launch Day, At Sea, Selling the Catch, Drama at Sea. *Working the Sea* shows the wide range of vessels engaged in fishing over the decades and the pace of change among them. The book features photos of the elegant schooner *L.A. Dunton*, the old pinky Maine as well as Oregon surf dories, Alaskan halibut longliners, California tuna seiners, and dozens of other types of fishing boats.

The final chapter details some of the disasters at sea written up in *National Fisherman*, such as the unusual story of the *Ben & Josephine*. The 92-foot side trawler was launched at Morse Boatbuilding in Thomaston in 1941. She left Gloucester in June 1942, bound for fishing grounds off Nova Scotia. The day after leaving Gloucester the boat encountered a German U-boat. The submarine crew first shot at the *Ben & Josephine*, then began to shell the vessel. The crew escaped in dories as the boat was sinking. No crew member was killed during the attack. They then rowed the dories toward Mt. Desert Rock, which they reached two days later. Four other U.S. and Canadian fishing vessels were destroyed by submarines that summer.

As we move further into this uncertain century, it's a pleasure to revisit the past and reflect on our collective fishing heritage, preserved and protected at the Penobscot Marine Museum.



The Muskegon launches at I.L. Snow & Company in 1937 in Rockland. The 72-foot by 18-foot all-wood scalloper and dragger had a 140-hp diesel engine but also main and mizzen sail.



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